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IN JOSEPHINE'S HOUSE.

BY GAIL HAMILTON.

THE grief of Josephine broods forever over Malmaison. Her gentle, sorrowful wraith gathers no gleam from the brilliant sunshine.

Malmaison, *mal maison*—evil house. What shadow of doom stretched far back into the centuries to give it so fitting a name? There is a legend that the Norman pirates ravaged this region a thousand years ago, and from their bloody baptism it was thereafter always known as the Evil Place.

Pirates of Normandy, splendor of empire, have alike passed from the smiling landscape, leaving, one could almost say, no trace. The high road thither winds among green hills, past old chateaus, well screened with verdure, whose lack of trimness would be a sore scandal to the new wealth of our Manchester-by-the-Sea. Can this highway, so like all the common ways of life, this road with only here and there a traveller, now a man chopping wood by the wayside, now a rough cart driven to its errands of the market, sparsely here and there the commonplace, unconscious faces—can this be the road crowded with brilliant, historic ghosts?

From this high road, pleasant, through a pleasant landscape, but in no way remarkable, you turn sharply through a stone gateway, descend into a meadow, and suddenly are somehow aware, not without a shock, that it is Malmaison. The intense, clear sunshine but intensifies the sadness of the saddest place in the world. It was so bright, so gay, so great. It is so still, so shabby, so insignificant. The house can never have been large or splendid or shapely; but oh! the kings that have gathered here, and the man who dethroned the kings, and the bevy of brilliant

women who follow in their train! The beautiful park where they wandered at will, looking just as picturesque, in their scant Empire gowns, their big hats, and their broad sashes, as the little Yankee girl who is wearing them so prettily and thoughtlessly to-day—the great park is a wilderness. In the lowland the grass springs rank, dank, unkempt. Great trees still lift themselves, but it is over a desolation. Nowhere is there a sign of living love or care or interest. A group of women and children, not even peasants, but probably some idlers from the village, are sitting, knitting, amusing themselves in thrifty, commonplace way under the shade where once sat Napoleon with Josephine in ostentatious virtue, that the full view from the windows of the *salon* might forestall any possible scandal from his visits to his discarded wife. And yet, possibly, the virtue was not so ostentatious, or the ostentation not so unnecessary, for it is pleasant to know that the stolid little Hapsburg could make the Great Napoleon cut around corners! She could not prevent him from visiting Josephine, but she made it so uncomfortable for him that he was fain to steal off unobserved!

The chateau itself is that most melancholy, most suggestive of sights, an abandoned home. A graystone house of modest dimensions, of the simplest architecture, shabby, shaky, silent. It is simply a long cube, the front door in the middle, one room deep, many rooms long, two stories high. The blinds of the large windows are closed and fastened. A broad ditch around the house is choked with a tangle of weeds. A rattling wooden bridge leads across it to the front door, but the door is locked, and shaking only jars it and seems to show the would-be, but inexperienced, burglar how easily it might be forced.

There is no access. How loud the birds sing, the bees hum! How flaunt the weeds, for even the flowers are weeds—stupid, unconscious things! But you can walk about the house. There is none to say you nay. The thicket on a little knoll behind the house looks attractive and is easily accessible through gaps in the falling fence, and I see Napoleon pacing there in the old, familiar attitude, his hands behind him, brow bent, the slight frown. Then it appears that the rear windows are unshuttered, and without shame the Yankee nose is pressed against a pane of Napoleon's kitchen glass. Hands and feet that learned to climb and creep long years ago around deserted cottages by New England school-

houses are pulling hard on Napoleon's lilac-bushes and pushing past the imperial sink-rose.

A little more imperial is the high iron fence stretching far above our heads, once brave with gilding of which the pointed pickets still retain a sullen gleam. We peer through the palings and behold a large quadrangular lawn in the rear of the house. The golden eagle of Napoleon still maintains solitary guard over the porch. If one could but enter. If one could but open this gate. Why, it does open! Mr. Dick could have given no wiser suggestion. It is an enclosure, but large enough to be spacious, and beyond its lower entrance, in line with the portico, is a stately avenue bordered with trees. It is a walk that the brilliant generals and the fine ladies must have haunted, and there is a fair vista. The roses are maddeningly bright and fresh and fragrant, springing, climbing, liting up the high iron fence with their heartless, imperishable vitality. But just by the door-stone, crowding between the threshold, a pretty thrust of slender hare-bells seems only innocent and inoffensive. New-comers they, who have no cause for tears and drooping. *They* were not there in the old days, when the mistress crossed the threshold and glided across this lawn with her gay ladies, in the golden morning of greatness, or when, a faded shadow, with every foreboding come dismally true, she surveyed her sad domain, a discrowned Empress, a discarded wife, for whom love and ambition could henceforth be but a bitter memory, for whom all personal interest and revenue in life must henceforth be remote as another world.

A man comes sauntering slowly up the long, tree-bordered way, whom a woman near has evidently summoned, and opens for us with a silver key the door of Josephine's house; the home she bought and established in Napoleon's nascent glory; the home she embellished with her presence; to which her warrior was glad to come returning successful from his wars; the home to which she fled with her wounded pride and her broken heart; and where once again, when Josephine was in her grave, the baffled and beaten Emperor came to pause one brief moment between his splendid past and his terrible future.

But few hints are left of what may have been its beauty or its gaiety—a few chairs with the golden *N* still dully distinct; the library with a book-case or two—no books; little economies of space

hinting the fullness of the room where now all is space and emptiness and dingy neglect and disorder. A few mirrors hang on the walls, but none long enough or low enough to show the full effect of the lovely Empire gowns to the lovely ladies that wore them—mirrors alas ! in which Josephine looked to find herself no longer fair. On the walls of grim, dismantled, shabby drawing-rooms, still a few painted gay figures of dancing girls, light and graceful and airily poised as those who have postured their golden dance through the ashen centuries of Pompeii.

This room with the inlaid wooden floor was the dining-room, and this mark is the place of Josephine's chair at table. I can see only a suspicious hole that reminds me of a New-England contrivance where the clang of the table-bell must not be heard, yet there are not servants enough to stand and wait. I trust Josephine did not have to feel around furtively and frantically with her foot under the table for the missing bell-spring when thoughtless ones had enlarged the table for company and forgotten to readjust its human relations.

The billiard-table remains, but without ball or cue, and some maps are still left from the Napoleonic days, and of the room where the Emperor held his councils scarce any decorative hints or tints remain, save the square wooden blocks and the diamond-shaped tiles of the inlaid floor. The rooms open on front and rear, and from both the view is rural and pleasing. From the front windows it may have been enchanting when love and hope and happiness crowned the gentle hills and wandered through the groves.

Up the broad staircase, the simple device of one long, narrow, mean corridor in the rear gives entrance to all the rooms. Modern art would wrestle with itself in agony till it had broken or disguised the monotonous length of that alley, which had nothing to say for itself but its windows. But if Napoleon cared little for corridors, it is easy to see that he had a better eye for clothes-closets than the Medici ! The rooms are small, but there are closets in them all, where those fine Empire gowns could be safely hung away from dust and damp and sun. The ends of the water-pipes, left uncovered, give a terrible suggestion of the backward sweep of the plumber's power. The rooms of Eugene and Hortense are very small, and hung with a paper whose good preservation still shows the coarseness

of its quality. Josephine may have been extravagant, but there is no trace of it at Malmaison. Wherever Napoleon goes, his glory of gilding attends him. Through the palaces of which he possessed himself, Tuileries or Trianons, he trailed his gold and silken beds as magnificently as any Bourbon of them all; just as magnificently and just as profusely as if the brain had not gathered on an iron camp-bed the rest which helped him to their overthrow. Still in the guarded coach-house of Versailles the golden coaches stand side by side, the "Divorce Coach," which bore away the weeping Josephine, no whit less gorgeous than that which bore Marie Louise to her bootless, if not fruitless, marriage. Wives may come and wives may go, but Napoleon goes on forever in his Cinderella's god-mother's pumpkin glory of glitter. But poor Josephine, bereft, abandoned, despairing, chose Malmaison, they say, because its sombre beauty in the deep heart of the wood met her sombre heart with dumb sympathy, and thus she made and kept it sombre for the same mood's sake.

Her grandson, the second Emperor, is said to have restored Malmaison. It is hard to believe it. Her fine pictures, which Napoleon used to chide her for carrying off to Malmaison, instead of leaving them in Paris, where the people could see them, have no more completely disappeared than have the pictures which Louis Napoleon hung in their places; and the punky planking, the powdering plaster, the dust and dirt, may as well be our inheritance from the first as the second Napoleon. It looks as if it had been there long enough for either.

Dearest of all to Josephine in her final retreat was the small chapel whither she betook herself for heavenly solace and prayer for her faithless husband. It is connected with the main house by a passage overarched with glass, so that wind or storm should not bar her from that sanctuary. Its bright blue ceiling, studded with stars, is all that remains to it of beauty or comeliness. All else is a wreck of broken plastering and splintered wood—the unvalued débris of an uncherished past.

Yet if it had been her pride only that was broken, and not also her heart, Josephine had her personal triumphs, even after Napoleon had repudiated her. Through yonder gateway, with gay flashing of cavalcade, came the kings who had crushed the husband, to compliment the wife. For her children's sake, for their future, and for her own dignity, it cannot but be that she

felt a thrill of pleasure, seeing herself thus reinstated, as it were, before the eyes of Europe.

And I think the Austrian Emperor, "my father," had the good taste to present his tribute by staying away; but the young Russian Czar, tall and handsome, after the manner of his kind, and not so crazy as he afterwards became, and the Prussian King, the "tall, dry-looking fellow," with his magnificent young son, whom we buried the other day as the Old Emperor, the Iron Emperor, with a world-wide sorrow—they paid their royal court to Josephine, and made her table royal once more, not with the dead insignia of rank, but with the living homage of reigning kings. Surely it is not in any woman's heart, least of all was it in the woman Josephine's heart, not to feel a pang of rapture at this fresh, if fleeting, coronation.

But if these kings, so fortunate and so splendid, who had hurry-scurried away before Napoleon, or had fallen at his feet, but who now, banded in defence of their order, had resumed the king business, posturing chivalrously before Josephine, and thus teaching people to respect kings by showing how they respected one who but for a brief hour the shadow of a kingly crown had on—if they could but have known how clearly their victim discerned them, and how contemptuously he would whistle them down the wind from the rock where they meant to chain him! It was not the edge of his sword alone they felt, but the edge of his wit, cleaving through kingly pomp and pose to the essential commonplace of monarchs whose wont it had been for generations to take themselves altogether seriously.

The Emperor of Austria, whose daughter had supplanted Josephine in full confidence that "my father's" word had the rigidity of a law of nature—the Emperor of Austria, stripped of his robes of state and brought to Napoleon's easel, was, with a charming candor that would have gratified Josephine, "though an imbecile, still a religious man and incapable of committing crimes"; a rather off-hand, but substantial, testimony to religion.

The King of Prussia, father of the man we know, is a stern enough and somewhat statuesque figure in the historical and Hohenzollern robes, but in the common light he is but "a tall, dry-looking fellow, a Don Quixote in appearance."

Was he a man of talent?

“Who? The King of Prussia?” and Napoleon burst into a fit of laughter. “*He* a man of talent! The greatest blockhead on earth. *The greatest blockhead on earth!* I know him well. At Tilsit we rode out every day together. The King of Prussia was *une bête*, and bored us so that Alexander and myself frequently galloped away in order to get rid of him.”

A private soldier bored by a king! A man without a name bored by a Hohenzollern!

“The King of Prussia was completely *au fait* as to the number of buttons there ought to be in front of a jacket, how many behind, and the manner in which the skirts ought to be cut. Not a tailor in the army knew better than King Frederick how many measures of cloth it took to make a jacket. When I went to see the King of Prussia, instead of a library, I found he had a large room like an arsenal, furnished with shelves and pegs, in which were placed fifty or sixty jackets of various modes. Every day he changed his fashion and put on a different one. He attached more importance to the cut of a dragoon uniform than was necessary for the salvation of a kingdom. If the French army had been commanded by a tailor, the King of Prussia would certainly have gained the day from his superior knowledge in that art; but as victories depend more upon the skill of the general commanding the troops than upon that of the tailor who makes the jacket, he failed. He cannot hold a conversation for five minutes. Not so his wife. She was a very clever, fine woman, but very unfortunate.”

She was that beautiful Louise, the adored mother of the late old Emperor William, whose quarrel with Napoleon all the world has taken up, whose wrongs at the hands of Napoleon her son was supposed conspicuously to have avenged when he overthrew the third Napoleon and marched into defeated Paris and captured Versailles, to be there proclaimed Emperor, at the very centre of French power, glory, and luxury. Yet even in the matter of the beautiful Louise, Napoleon has much to say for himself. He eulogized her. He maintained that if the King had brought her at first to Tilsit, it would probably have procured him better terms.

“She was elegant, ingenuous, and extremely well informed,” declared the man who is reported to have insulted her. “She bitterly lamented the war. ‘Oh,’ said she to me, ‘the memory

of the Great Frederic led us astray. We believed ourselves equal to him, and we are not !' Grief for the losses and the humiliations which her husband and her country sustained may have accelerated her death. But that was not my fault. Why did her husband declare war against me ? However, instead of treating her barbarously, nobody could have paid her more attention or respect, or have esteemed her more, for which I received her thanks."

In the broad light of human nature, it is far more probable that the brilliant, patriotic, and ambitious Queen died because she, like Napoleon, had a soul—it is only literal truth, and not vulgarity to say—above buttons; because she saw genius and statesmanship arrayed against her country, and stupidity and frivolity gambling it away, and could by no force of her higher power prevent it. She was quite clever enough to discern not only her King's tailorship, but also that the King, who was not a tailor, discerned it too.

And for continuance of harsh fate, we are told now that even her beauty is not her own in this generation, and that the lovely Richter picture, which has made it a household word even to her kin beyond sea, the gracious, graceful woman, gliding lightly down the palace stairs, a velvet cloak thrown over her shapely shoulders, the lace scarf floating from her lovely neck, every fair, fine feature aglow with sweetness and spirit—alas ! it is not Queen Louise at all, but some unknown Berlin *fräulein* who was supposed to resemble her !

Is it even possible that a Napoleonic insight might detract somewhat from the divinity that doth hedge the late august Emperor ? The most imperial figure among contemporary kings might show us that, though the son rightly inherits from the mother and not the father, the soul of Queen Louise skipped a generation, as souls are much moved to do, and reappeared in her grandson, leaving her son to share only the narrower limits of his father's mental domain. In that diary, stolen and sore beset, but cannily fixed against fate, which has lately found its way out from bolts and bars, through devious ways, to print and publicity, the man of iron, the inflexible Emperor, who defied storm and stress, pursued but one aim, put back even death, and touched the heart of the whole human world in his stately solitude and sorrow,—is seen without his triple brass and

oak, a weary old man, a warrior perforce, caring little for empire, to whom the siege of Paris was a bore, who wanted to be amused and did not see why he should be made to fight ; who craved the theatre, and trundled about such a clutter of carriages that the younger Hohenzollern was fain to indulge in what is almost a sneer.

But the younger Hohenzollern, who faced the new time, who saw in the soul's large-visioned way, who so pathetically and confidently owned the future, yet never entered into possession, the Queen Louise's Hohenzollern, fell across the threshold and died beneath the lintels of his inheritance.

The sun is still bright, and the flowers of mid-afternoon are flaunting, but the villagers put up their knitting, and I am reminded that there is a suggestion of malaria in the fame as well as in the name of Malmaison. So we leave the great, the beautiful, the always sad ghosts to glide forever, as long as history shall last, through the silent greenery of Malmaison, and along the pleasant road we go—where else than to the pleasant little village of Reuil, where Josephine sleeps ?

Not so gloomy as the house of her living death is the house of her final rest. Through the gorgeous stained glass of the village church the sunshine streams, aslant and golden, penetrating even the dusk chapel where her sad heart lies unthrobbing. A weary weight of marble is piled above it, cold and white, but not so cruel as the burden it bore in life. Eugene and Hortense raised the marble to Josephine, and not far off, but in a crypt below, dark and dreary, lies her daughter and victim, the beautiful and blighted Hortense—a victim all in vain.

"She was *si bonne*," says the old woman, shadow of a shade, who guards these dead and to whom, I observe, Hortense is a dearer name than Josephine. The golden palm of Martinique lies upon the golden cloth above Hortense's tomb, and a golden pelle returns a ghostly magnificence to the feeble candle's glimmer.

"She was lovely even in her coffin," sighs the old woman. "The folds of lace were so soft and pretty, pinned across her beautiful neck and shoulders !"

Ah ! but there is a spiritual body.

GAIL HAMILTON.